

VZCZCXRO4204
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHGO #1828/01 3610427
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 270427Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5539
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0080
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4422
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3673
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7178
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4763
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 1002
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1005
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0775
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2982
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0645

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001828

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/26/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: THE KNU AFTER GENERAL BO MYA

REF: A. RANGOON 1767

[1](#)B. RANGOON 1536

[1](#)C. RANGOON 1065

RANGOON 00001828 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The death of Karen insurgent leader General Bo Mya did not come as a surprise, but leaves the Karen National Union (KNU) without a strong, charismatic leader. Sidelined by poor health in recent years, Bo Mya continued to influence KNU leaders and policy. It is uncertain if the recently mended rift between the KNU and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) will hold, or if a power struggle will ensue among key Karen rebel factions until a clear leader emerges. Long-awaited peace talks with the Burmese regime are unlikely to resume until the KNU leaders feel secure in their positions. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) General Bo Mya, legendary Karen strongman, died of complications from diabetes in Mae Sot, Thailand on December [1](#)24. Following his burial in one of the few remaining Karen-held enclaves in Burma on December 26, it is uncertain what affect his passing will have on the KNU. Although he struggled in recent years with diabetes and heart disease, compounded by a stroke in 2005 that confined him to a wheelchair, he continued to serve as a senior advisor to KNU leaders. Following his death, KNU leaders were quick to affirm that KNU policies would not change, although this could be wishful thinking.

WILL A DYNASTY EMERGE?

[1](#)3. (C) KNU General Secretary Pado Mahn Sha lacks the charisma of Bo Mya. Other Karen leaders with extensive experience, such as the 7th Brigade's long-time leader Brigadier General Htay Maung, are elderly and in poor health. Some Karen view U.S.-educated Colonel Ner Dah, second son of Bo Mya, as an

eventual successor to his father. However, many KNU Central Executive Committee members mistrust Ner Dah after he and Htay Maung (his maternal uncle) tried to negotiate a separate deal with the Burmese regime in July 2006 (ref C). According to Kachin ethnic leader Dr. Saboi Jum, a long-time confidant of Bo Mya, the Karen have usually selected their leaders democratically, and most ethnic insurgents in Burma have not passed leadership from father to son.

14. (C) It is not clear if being the son of Bo Mya is an asset or a liability for Ner Dah. He may have risen in the KNLA due to his father's influence, but with Bo Mya off the scene Karen leaders who may have resented "daddy's boy" may work to curtail Ner Dah's influence. The Burmese regime reportedly prefers to negotiate with Ner Dah than with Pado Mahn Sha.

HOW WILL THE DKBA REACT?

15. (C) Bo Mya's policy in the 1970s and 1980s of naming Christians to key leadership positions in the KNU and the KNLA, and promoting Christian values in order to invoke God's blessing on his cause, backfired when many Buddhist soldiers of the KNLA broke away in the 1990s and formed the rival Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), the Burmese Army's Karen proxy. Some believe that with Bo Mya out of the picture the DKBA might be amenable to reconciliation with the KNU. However, a prominent Karen journalist in Rangoon told us he believes this is unlikely as the DKBA profits financially through cross border trade with Thailand and sales of methamphetamines.

WILL THE BURMESE ARMY MAKE ITS MOVE?

16. (C) According to sources in the KNLA's 7th Brigade, Burmese Army reps and a DKBA delegation attended Bo Mya's funeral. The same sources claim the Burmese Army and the

RANGOON 00001828 002.2 OF 002

DKBA have already moved significant numbers of troops close to KNLA positions and are poised to attack (ref A). The 7th Brigade says it has prepared its defense, but is not hopeful it could withstand a prolonged battle. The source claims that the Burmese Army and DKBA forces facing the KNLA do not want to fight and prefer to cooperate with the KNLA in trading activities, but will attack if ordered. The Karen worry that the Burmese Army might take advantage of the possible KNU leadership vacuum to press a military solution to the Karen insurgency.

17. (C) COMMENT: Bo Mya's death may not precipitate major KNU leadership changes given that he was ill for several years and no longer actively ran the KNU. However, we doubt the KNU will send another delegation to Rangoon (ref B) to conduct peace talks with the Burmese regime until its leaders feel their positions are secure. We also question whether the Burmese regime will engage in serious negotiations with the KNU, particularly if it feels the KNU is vulnerable and a quick military victory is possible. END COMMENT.
VILLAROSA